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## What is claimed is:

- 1. A method of controlling communications between at least one first contracting party and potential second contracting parties on the basis of third party information from an agent, the third party information including at least the identity of the first contracting party and a description of contractual subject matter, comprising the steps of:
  - (a) receiving and storing third party information;
  - (b) providing access to the contractual subject matter of the third party information for queries by second contracting parties;
  - c) receiving bids from second contracting parties for access to the identity of the first contracting party, each bid including at least a statement of a closing fee offered by the second contracting party for closing a contract with the first contracting party; receiving a bid fee for each bid from each second contracting party making a bid; and storing the bids and bid fees, and
  - d) determining the bids with the N highest statements of closing fees at a predetermined time with N ≥ 1; transmitting the identity of the first contracting party to the N second contracting parties making the N bids; and transmitting at least a portion of all bid fees to the agent.
  - 2. The method of claim 1, including the further steps of:
    - e) receiving evaluation data relative to the third party information within a predetermined interval of time, and
    - f1) if an evaluation data indicates that a contract has been closed between the first contracting party and one of the second contracting parties, receiving the closing fee included in the bid of the particular second contracting party and transmitting at least a

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- share thereof to the agent, or
- f2) if no evaluation data indicates closing of a contract, but evaluation data is received from a majority of the second contracting parties which have made the N bids, recovering the bid fees from the agent and returning them to the second contracting parties.
- 3. The method of claim 1, wherein only bids comprising the M highest statements of bid fees are admitted for determining the N bids, wherein  $M \ge N$ .
- 10 4. The method of claim 1, wherein only bids the bid fee of which exceeds a predetermined threshold value are considered for determining the N bids.
  - 5. The method of claim 1, wherein in respect of each agent statistical data is kept and updated about one of its third party information and evaluation data relating to all its third party information.
  - 6. The method of claim 5, wherein at least one of the share of the bid fees and the share of the closing fee is determined on the basis of the statistical data.
- 7. The method of claim 1, wherein for every second contracting party submitting a bid there is maintained and updated statistical data regarding at least one of its bids and evaluation data.
- 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the bid fee is set on the basis of the statistical data and is accepted upon placement of a bid by the second contracting party.
  - 9. The method of claim 1, wherein the second contracting parties are classified and the bid fee of a party is determined by the classification of that

party.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein a statement of the amount of its bid fee is received in step c) from the second contracting party.

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- 11. The method of claim 1, wherein N and the description of the contractual subject matter are made available for querying.
- 12. The method of claim 1, wherein the third party information includes a statement relating to the quality of the information which is made available for querying together with the description of the contractual subject matter.
  - 13. The method of claim 12, wherein the statement relating to the quality of the information includes a statement of its origin.

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- 14. The method of claim 1, wherein during storage the description of the contractual subject of the third party information matter is classified in accordance with predetermined classes.
- 20 15. The method of claim 14, wherein the third party information is classified by means of an expert system for guiding the agent.
  - 16. The method of claim 14, wherein the bid fee is determined on the basis of the classification of the description of the contractual subject matter.

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17. The method of claim 1, wherein the second contracting parties are classified and access to the description of the contractual subject matter by a predetermined second contracting party is only granted in dependence of the classification of the predetermined second contracting party.

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- 18. The method of claim 17, wherein the reception of bids from a predetermined second contracting party is only granted in dependence of the classification of the predetermined second contracting party.
- 19. A computer system for controlling communications between at least one first contracting party and potential second contracting parties on the basis of third party information from an agent, the third party information including at least the identity of the at least one first contracting party and a description of the contractual subject matter, comprising:
  - a first data base provided with an input interface for the agent by which third party information is received, the first data base being provided with a private section and a public section, at least the identity of the first contracting party being stored in the private section and the description of the contractual subject matter being stored in the public section, and further with a queries interface by which potential second contracting parties may query the public section;

an accounts maintenance device for keeping credit accounts for each agent inputting third party information;

a second data base including an input interface by which second contracting parties may input bids for being granted access to the private section of the first data base regarding specific third party information, each bid including at least a statement of a closing fee offered by that second contracting party to close a contract with the first contracting party, and each bid having associated therewith a predetermined bid fee;

an accounts maintenance device for keeping credit accounts for every second contracting party submitting a bid;

a collective storage for collecting bid fees, each submission of a bid into the second data base causing the transfer of the associated bid fee from the credit account of the submitting second contracting party to the collective storage; and

an auction device for determining from the second data base at a predetermined point in time the bids having the N highest statements of closing fees, wherein  $N \ge 1$ , for granting to every second contracting party which has submitted one of the N bids access to the private section of the first data base in respect of the third party information relevant to the bid, and for causing the transfer of a predetermined share of all bid fees collected in the collective storage to the credit account of the agent having furnished the relevant third party information.

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- 20. The computer system of claim 19, further comprising an evaluation device provided with at least one input interface for receiving evaluation data, the evaluation device enabling the reception of evaluation data relating to the third party information within a predetermined time interval and for causing the transfer of at least a share of the closing fee stated in the bid of a second contracting party from its credit account to the credit account of the agent if the evaluation data indicates the closing of a contract between the first contracting party and the second contracting party.
- 21. The computer system of claim 20, wherein the evaluation device causes the bid fees to be returned from the credit account of the agent to the credit accounts of the second contracting parties when evaluation data is received from a majority of the second contracting parties having placed the N bids and no closed contract is indicated by the evaluation device.

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- 22. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the auction device determines the N bids on the basis of the bids comprising the M highest Statements of bid fees.
- 23. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the auction device determines

the N bids on the basis of the bids the bid fee of which exceeds a predetermined threshold value.

- 24. The computer system of claim 20, further comprising a third data base connected to the evaluation device and storing and updating at least one of statistical data relating to the third party information from each agent and evaluation data pertaining to all the third party information from each agent.
- 25. The computer system of claim 24, wherein the data base for statistical data controls at least one of the size of the share of bid fees and the size of the share of the closing fee.
  - 26. The computer system of claim 20, further comprising a fourth data base connected to the evaluation device and storing and updating statistical data relating to at least one of the bids of each bidding second contracting party or its evaluation data.
    - 27. The computer system of claim 26, wherein the second data base determines the amount of the bid fee for a second contracting party.
    - 28. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the second contracting parties are classified and the amount of a bid fee is determined in dependence of a classification of the second contracting party querying the first data base.
- 25 29. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the input interface of the second data base receives a statement from the second contracting party about the amount of the bid fee.
  - 30. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the queries interface of the first

data base makes available for querying the number N together with a description of the contractual subject matter.

- 31. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the third party information includes a statement about the quality of the information.
  - 32. The computer system of claim 31, wherein the statement includes a statement about the origin of the quality statement.
- 10 33. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the input interface of the first data base classifies the description of the contractual subject matter from the third party information on the basis of predetermined classes.
- 34. The computer system of claim 33, wherein the classification by the input interface is aided by an expert system for guiding the agent.
  - 35. The computer system of claim 33, wherein the amount of the bid fee is determined in dependence of the classification of the description of the contractual subject matter.

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36. The computer system of claim 19, wherein the second contracting parties are provided with at least one of an identity and a classification and wherein the input interface of the second data base accepts bids from a second contracting party only in dependence of at least one of the identity and classification.

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37. The computer system of claim 36, wherein the input interface of the first data base permits querying the public section only depending upon the classification of the querying second contracting party.

38. A computer program product embodied on a machine readable data carrier for controlling communications between at least one first contracting party and potential second contracting parties on the basis of third party information from an agent, the third party information including at least the identity of the first contracting party and a description of contractual subject matter, comprising:

a first code segment for receiving and storing third party information;

a second code segment for providing access to the contractual subject matter of the third party information for queries by second contracting parties;

a third code segment for receiving bids from second contracting parties for access to the identity of the first contracting party, each bid including at least a statement of a closing fee offered by the second contracting party for closing a contract with the first contracting party; for receiving a bid fee for each bid from each second contracting party making a bid; and for storing the bids and bid fees; and

a fourth code segment for determining the bids with the N highest statements of closing fees at a predetermined time with N  $\geq$  1; for transmitting the identity of the first contracting party to the N second contracting parties making the N bids; and for transmitting at least a portion of all bid fees to the agent.

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